

Message Text

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PAGE 01 STATE 108365
ORIGIN ARA-14

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TO AMEMBASSY ASUNCION PRIORITY
INFO AMEMBASSY PANAMA

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 108365

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: BBAK, PA

SUBJECT: CONGRESSIONAL INQUIRY RE BONA FIDES OF RUBEN
RAMIREZ PENA

1. SENATOR GRAVEL'S OFFICE HAS REQUESTED ASSESSMENT OF THE BONA FIDES OF PARAGUAYAN SENATOR RUBEN RAMIREZ PENA. THE POST WILL RECALL THAT GRAVEL MET RAMIREZ PENA DURING A VISIT TO PARAGUAY, AND RECENTLY SENT A CONGRATULATORY MESSAGE WHEN RAMIREZ PENA WAS RE-ELECTED TO OFFICE IN FEBRUARY.
2. DURING GRAVEL'S VISIT, HE MENTIONED TO RAMIREZ PENA HIS INTEREST IN A SEA LEVEL CANAL THROUGH PANAMA. RAMIREZ PENA PICKED UP ON THIS PROJECT, AND IN A MARCH 9 LETTER ACKNOWLEDGING THE CONGRATULATORY MESSAGE, OFFERED TO SPREAD THE SEA LEVEL CANAL IDEA AMONG CONTACTS ELSEWHERE IN THE HEMISPHERE.

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3. SENATOR GRAVEL WOULD APPRECIATE HELP FROM RAMIREZ PENA IN GATHERING SUPPORT FOR THE PROJECT, BUT DESIRES TO KNOW MORE ABOUT HIM FIRST. WITHIN THE PARAGUAYAN CONTEXT, HE WOULD LIKE AN OPINION AS TO WHETHER RAMIREZ PENA HAS A CLEAN REPUTATION, PARTICULARLY IN BUSINESS DEALINGS. GRAVEL IS NOT CONCERNED THAT THE PARAGUAYAN MIGHT BE A WHEELER DEALER, "AS LONG AS HE IS NOT AN OUTRIGHT CROOK."

CLEARLY, TO HAVE HIS CANAL PROJECT PROMOTED BY AN INDIVIDUAL OF DUBIOUS REPUTATION WOULD NOT BE HELPFUL.

4. ANY ENLIGHTENING INFORMATION WHICH COULD BE PASSED TO GRAVEL WOULD BE APPRECIATED. VANCE

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